



1998 Opening Session News

Representative Marc Boldt
17th District



Dear friends,

A new year has begun and so has a new legislative session. This year, our session, which began Jan. 12, is scheduled to last only 60 days. But we have much to accomplish during this short time period.

At the top of the list will be how to deal with an \$861 million budget surplus. As you can guess, many people will be looking for ways to spend that money. I think it is better to abide with the spirit of Initiative 601 which calls for this money to be set aside in case of a future economic downturn. I believe there is also room for some tax cuts and making sure that important programs for children and the developmentally disabled continue to be funded. But I don't think that in this short session we should try to re-write the biennial budget — especially since it is only nine months after we passed it with bipartisan support.

Other issues to come before us include growth management reform, cracking down on drunk drivers, how to fund transportation needs, water rights, improving early reading programs in schools, juvenile justice funding and more.

This newsletter offers a brief look at important issues facing us in the 1998 session. Should you have any questions about these or other topics, please feel free to call or write my office.

Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve as your state representative.

Rep. Marc Boldt
District 17
(360) 786-7994



No new gas tax

I've made no bones about where I stand on this issue. Certainly we must meet our transportation needs. But not with an increase in the state's gas tax. It makes no sense to increase taxes when the state already has a hefty surplus of your hard-earned tax money.

I've also been very concerned about how your money is being spent when it comes to transportation. In the three years since I've served as your state representative, I've witnessed too many times the unresponsiveness of those who spend your money and the lack of accountability within the Department of Transportation's budget. As a result, we appropriated money in the last session to conduct a full performance audit of the state's transportation system. As taxpayers, you deserve to know how your money is being spent and if you are getting the most for your hard-earned dollars. Despite a push from the governor to increase gas taxes, our Republican leadership has said it will not be considered this year. I agree with that approach. I think we can push for more efficiencies and accountability in the Department of Transportation and find other ways to fund needed projects besides increasing your taxes.



License tabs too high?

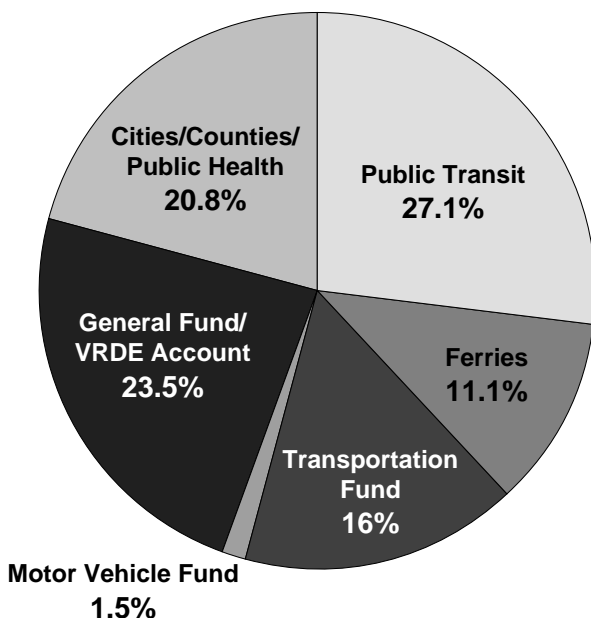
Did you realize that when you purchase a Washington state vehicle registration license for that new car you just bought, you are paying on the sticker price of the automobile and not the price you bartered for hours? In the eyes of the state of Washington, the value of the car stays the same even though in real life, the car's value drops dramatically the moment you drive it off the lot!

Did you also know that the money you pay for your license tabs does not just go for transportation needs? In fact the money, known as the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax or MVET, is divided up into several areas of government.

A high percentage of it goes to mass transit to operate ferries up north in Puget Sound. Twenty percent of the entire Department of Transportation budget is used for ferries which move only 1 percent of the population. Does that really make sense?

Here's a look at what your vehicle license tabs pay for:

CURRENT DISTRIBUTION OF MVET REVENUES



Legend (Revenues in Millions)

Public Transit	\$431.0	27.1%
Ferries	\$176.5	11.1%
Transportation Fund	\$254.8	16.0%
Motor Vehicle Fund	\$23.1	1.5%
General Fund/VRDE Account	\$372.8	23.5%
Cities / Counties / Public Health	\$330.9	20.8%
Total	\$1,589.2	100%

Providing flexibility and local control within the Columbia Gorge

The federal law simply was intended to "protect the natural and cultural resources and promote the economy" within the Columbia Gorge. But some people want to completely close up any opportunities for people to live and work within the gorge. The federal requirement can certainly be implemented by the counties. I worked all year in both Washington and Oregon to bring this about. The problem is that the Columbia River Gorge Commission wants all the control.

I will continue to make it a priority that the people living in the gorge are the ones who make the decisions dealing with the gorge. Further, I fully intend to make **absolutely** sure that decisions concerning the state of Washington are made **within** the state of Washington.... and **NOT** Multnomah County in Oregon.

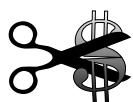
Your voice in annexation

Last year, the bill I sponsored to make it possible for a public vote for annexation into a city such as Vancouver passed the House, but died in the Senate. I still believe that if a vote for annexation of the Hazel Dell area is required, then a vote for any such annexation should be required. I will ask that this bill be sent back to the Senate this year for its approval.



Boldt opposes fishing license fee increase

Under the guise of "license simplification," the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is proposing to increase fees for seniors and begin charging children under the age of 14 to fish for the first time in our state's history. It's hard to imagine that the state could have such little concern about children by forcing them to break open their piggy banks to pay for a fishing license. It's also hard to imagine an enforcement officer asking a young child who is fishing to provide identification and show the license. Will young children be issued the same fines as adults if they are fishing without a license? The state currently has a plentiful budget surplus, and yet this agency wants to take money from children and force their grandparents to pay more. It's not right and I will fight it.



Reducing duplicity of unemployment benefits

Along with welfare benefits, Washington is among the top states in total benefits given to the unemployed. Businesses in Washington pay among the most of any state in unemployment insurance. Yet, we have stopped our requirement that recipients search for work. We also do not check other states, or even other agencies, for duplicate benefits. Unemployed people do deserve benefits. However, before we tax businesses more, we must look into fraud, require the unemployed to look for work, and in fact, verify that they are looking for work.



Reducing interstate welfare fraud

Being a border county, we see it frequently — people who reside in Oregon getting a post office box in Vancouver and then collecting a welfare check from Washington state in addition to the one they get from Oregon. It's called welfare fraud.

Why does it happen so easily? Currently, we have no formal communication with any other state to check for duplicate assistance. Now that the federal welfare plan has restricted welfare benefits to five years, it becomes even more imperative that we begin communicating with each other.

During the interim, I hosted a meeting of key individuals who work with public assistance in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. It was the beginning of a dialogue that I hope to continue with the welfare issue.

As in the past three years, I will again work this session on fraud prevention and investigations. However, this year I will begin the process for one of the first Tri-state Compacts for the communication of state benefits. It is essential that we make sure welfare benefits go to those in need — not to those full of greed.



Reps. Marc Boldt and Jim Dunn check on details of legislation from a laptop computer on the House floor. This year, all House members will have laptop computers from which they can check on legislation, receive and send e-mail, conduct research, and have word processing capabilities to more efficiently respond to constituent requests.



Drug-addicted babies — who is responsible?

Babies are being born addicted to drugs at an alarming rate. Many of them are from the same mother. It is one of the saddest and most frustrating subjects I have come across. I realize there must be a balance between prevention, treatment and rights. But why is it okay to bring a child into this world hooked on drugs? I will be introducing legislation to bring this issue into conversation. The legislation would also make drug abuse within families equivalent to child neglect.

Support for foster care

As you may have read, we have many problems keeping good homes for taking care of people from children to the disabled through senior citizens. This comes from the many divisions of Department of Social and Health Services. I will be working this session on ways to support those who serve so faithfully. Also, I am looking at a system that may contract out all services for foster care.

Join our team --

One of the hardest areas of legislation is concerning bills that require quick decisions on my part, but with which I have little knowledge.

I would like to involve you. If you have an area of expertise, and are willing to assist myself and others, please send me your name and number, along with the best time to call.

I look forward to hearing from you.



Listen in on the Legislature

Any citizen who has a computer with a sound system and access to the Internet can listen to all deliberations of the Legislature **live**. The deliberations are also stored for later access on demand. This is a free service provided by TVW, the statewide nonprofit television network which is the equivalent of C-SPAN at the national level. Just visit TVW's web site at <http://www.tvw.org>. The required software, RealAudio, is also free and can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.real.com>. You may also access current bill information on the Internet at: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/www/bills.htm>

Coming to Olympia? Let us know!

If you are planning to come to Olympia during the legislative session, give us a call and we'll be happy to provide you with some helpful information. Parking can sometimes be a problem, but the Visitor Center on campus can help to direct you to parking areas. Tours of the state capitol are also available. If you call in advance, I may be able to schedule a visit with you. My office is located on the fourth floor of the John L. O'Brien Building, Room 403. The phone number is: (360) 786-7994.



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Washington State
Department of Printing

The Boldt Report
1998 Opening Session News

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